

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

A Guide to the Ash Heap of History: President Ronald Reagan's Speech to the British Parliament

- Standard: I. Culture
II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
IV. Individual Development and Identity
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
VIII. Science, Technology, and Society
IX. Global Connections
X. Civic Ideals and Practices
- Grade Level: 9–12
- Objectives: The student will:
- Analyze a speech by President Ronald Reagan
 - Evaluate the status of communism according to President Reagan
 - Compare the path of communism with timeline events
 - Determine the accuracy of a political cartoon
- Time: 1 class period
- Materials: Documents: **1982** *The Ash Heap of History*
- Resources: *Timeline of the Berlin Wall and Change in Europe*
Access to the video of President Reagan's speech:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCu7-Ka_zbY
- Exercises: *A Guide to the "Ash Heap of History"*
Cartoon: *"I Can't Believe My Eyes"*
- Procedures:

Setting the Stage

President Ronald Reagan was a skilled orator. Two of his speeches made in 1982 and 1983 produced memorable Cold War-era phrases. In one speech, the President referred to the Soviet Union as "the evil empire." The other speech, made to the British Parliament, relegated communism to the "ash heap of history." This phrase or something similar ironically was coined by Russian communist leader Leon Trotsky in 1917. (*Note*: Interchangeable with "ash heap" are the terms "garbage heap" or "dustbin.")

Activity 1

- 1.** Distribute copies of the document, *The Ash Heap of History*. Explain the significance of this speech.
- 2. Optional:** Set-up the video of President Reagan's speech and play while the students read the speech.
- 3.** Provide copies of the exercise, *A Guide to the "Ash Heap of History."* Students should examine the speech and find quotes that address the items listed in the exercise. The quotes may be written in full or paraphrased on the lines adjoining the items.
- 4.** Discuss the highlights of the speech and have students provide the quotes they collected.
 - a.** What is the tone of the speech? Is the President angry, firm, flippant, antagonistic, mellow?
 - b.** Which phrase, other than "ash heap of history," best describes the content of the speech?
 - c.** According to President Reagan, what problems was the Soviet Union experiencing?
 - d.** What type of review (as political pundits provide) would you give President Reagan's speech?
- 5.** Have students examine the *Timeline of the Berlin Wall and Change in Eastern Europe* and determine the outcome of President Reagan's prediction consigning communism to the ash heap of history. Discuss students' conclusions.

Activity 2

- 1.** Distribute copies of the cartoon, *I Can't Believe My Eyes!*, to students and have them complete the analysis.
- 2.** Students may refer to the *Timeline of the Berlin Wall and Change in Eastern Europe* for information if needed.
- 3.** Discuss the information gathered from the cartoon.
- 4.** Ask the students if President Reagan was a fortune-teller? Did he have such an accurate picture of the future of the Soviet Union and communism that he predicted their downfall? Or, was he hoping that events would transpire as they did? Was it a case of good vs. evil and knowing that good would prevail? How can the leader of a country project the aura of "everything will be all right" in the atmosphere of peril?
- 4.** Listen to sections of President Reagan's speech to close out class. ■